

[Mr. William P. Jones]

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FOLKLORE - White Pioneers

Miss Effie Cowan, P. W.

McLennan County, Texas

District No. 8.

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Interview with Mr. William P. Jones, Reagan, Texas.

“My parents were Richard and Sarah Jones, and I was born in Carolina County, Virginia, in 1852. I came with my parents to Texas in the year 1860. We came by boat down the Mississippi river, then through the Gulf of Mexico and landed at Galveston, Texas, and came from there up the Bayou to Houston and from Houston we came overland in ox-wagons to our first home, which was at Navasota, Texas. My father bought land from some squatters and in time, the rightful heirs came and claimed it, so we lost the land.

“While we were living in Navasota, the Civil War was declared and four of my brothers served under the flag of the Confederacy. Walter was in Hood's Brigade and was killed in action; another, Napoleon, was in the same Brigade but he lived to return home. Stanfield fought in Speight's Brigade and he, too, returned home after the war. He fought

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in Louisiana. Richard Hampton was in Tom Green's Brigade and he, too, came back. He was also in some of the battles.

"At the close of the war, the yellow fever broke out in Texas and was getting close to where we lived near Navasota, so, when the Houston and Texas Central Railroad reached Bryan, we moved to Falls County. I rode the first engine into Bryan, Texas. We settled on Hog Island, a little settlement a few miles above the present town of Reagan, nine miles south of Marlin, Texas. At this time the town of Reagan had not been laid off, but when the railroad came, Bill Reagan, brother of the late Judge John H. Reagan, owned a lot of land near by and he donated he town site, hence the name of Reagan, in honor of the man who gave the land for the town-site. C - 12 Tex.

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"When father became settled at Hog Island he organized a Baptist Sunday School. However other denominations worshipped with us until their church was built. Until we built a church, we held services in our home. Two of our first ministers were Rev. Harper and Tubb. Rev. Harper was the first postmaster and Brother Tubb had a store and later the post office was located in his store. The present postmaster, Mr. Higgins, has served as postmaster at Reagan for fifty-two years.

"As the railroad was being built through the community, I spent my time playing around and watching the men at work, and during their lunch hour I remember how the men had their fun with me. After the railroad was built on to Marlin and Waco, we moved to Reagan and lived there while I was a boy in school. The first stores at this time were owned by Sam and Andrew Peyton, Captain Johnson and Dr. McDowell had a drug store. Other families were those of Harper, Robbins, Fountain, [Boyles?], McCoy, Cotton, Rankin, Hayes, Hagen, Rogers, Guffy, Davidson, and J. E. Davis. At the foot of Blue Ridge were the families of Dick Beal, Owen, Hunnicutt, Harlan, Johnson and Adams. This was only about six or eight miles from Reagan and they came to attend church after the Reagan churches were built.

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"At the close of the war there was constant fear of the negroes "rising up" against the whites, but in our community they settled peacefully to work, most of them stayed on with their former masters. They worked the land on the "shares" (part of the crop). Until the railroad 3 came through, we travelled by stage coach. There is an old stage stand on the [Kosse?]-Reagan road, eight miles from Reagan, and it stands today just as in the days when the stage travel was at its best. But it is now used for a barn for stock in a pasture. As one looks back a vision of the hurry of the stage on its way as the horses dash madly up to the stand and the wait is only long enough for the horses to be changed. Instead of changing cars for "all points north and south, to Houston or Waco, Fort Worth and Dallas" the driver shouts as the ringing of the bells on the bridles of the horses, warn the passengers they are nearing a stop, "Change - Stage Coaches". And the passengers crawl out of the old coach and feel to see if their hats or perhaps their heads are still on. For you know that those coaches did not even have any springs to make riding easy, but were held by huge leather straps instead of the later-day springs.

"Our freight was brought by wagon train from Houston and [Milliken?], the terminal of the Houston and Texas Central railroad when we moved to Falls County. Gil Ward ran a freight line and Mr. Mance Cabiness handled race horses and sold not only cattle but fine horses to men who followed the race track. A thousand dollars was not uncommon for a fine race horse to bring when it was sold.

"In September 1877, I married Miss Willie Riley, a daughter of Captain Riley of Alabama. To us were born thirteen children. All lived to be grown. There are two boys: Howard and Austin, who live in Reagan; another, Walter Lee, lives in Beaumont; Willard lives in Goose Creek; Clyde, Otis, Chester, Earle and Byrd live in Port Arthur. Two daughters 4 live in Dallas. Orville Groner, liver in Dallas and is financial secretary of the Baptist Convention. Mrs. Maud Dilworth, lives in Longview, and Dexter in Waco, Tom, deceased.

"After I reached manhood I lived for a few years in Marlin and did contracting work. I helped to build some of the first business houses and hotels in Marlin. The wrecking of the

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Arlington Hotel recently, brings back to memory the days when the first hotel was called a tavern. This was during the days of the stage coach and the "tavern" was owned and operated by H. B. Coleman, who was known to all who frequented the place as "Uncle Henry". T.J. Read bought it from Mr. Coleman and owned the lot which was bought by the Marlin Natatorium Company in 1895.

"The tavern was the center of social life in Marlin and the better class of visitors, travelling men and politicians stopped here. It became the favorite gathering place, especially of the politicians. Here they gathered to select their candidates and to hold their party meetings. But it was not until 1894 that the first indication of the curative power of the Marlin Hot Wells became a thing to consider, when a visitor was cured of a blood infection after bathing in the hot water.

"In the spring of 1895, the first effort was made to commercialize the hot wells and the Marlin Natatorium Company was formed of local residents and bought the lot where the old [?] tavern stood from Mr. Foster. The tavern was torn down and the company created a hotel and bath house. The name of the firm was changed to the Marlin Sanitarium Company. A swimming pool was first built, but later the bath tubs were installed. In January 1899, fire destroyed the bath house and hotel. After this happened, the company sold the property to Marx Levy, who immediately began the building of the New Arlington Hotel, which was to serve the town for many years. The cost of the hotel and furnishings were in excess of 200,000. An artist was secured at an expense of several thousand dollars to decorate the interior of the building and these decorations were recognized as some of the most beautiful in the southwest for many years.

"The hotel when first erected contained its own heating system, laundry, power plant, barber shop, bar, and all conveniences of a modern and up-to-date hotel of this period. L. Z. Harrison, a son-in-law of Mr. Levy, was made manager of the New Arlington, and C. O. Chetham was the manager of the old hotel. As the old Read tavern in days gone by was

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the center of the social and political life, so the New Arlington became the center of this same life again.

“It was about this time that the major league baseball teams began to send their teams to Marlin for their training. The White Sox first came in 1900. Then the Philadelphia Phillies, Cincinnati Reds, St. Louis Browns and a number of other leagues trained here for a number of years. All of these teams made the New Arlington their headquarters, adding many illustrious names of the baseball world to the hotel register.

“But it was for the New York Giants to bring fame to Marlin as the training site for baseball teams. They prepared their own training field that was known as “Giant's Park”, and is remembered by old baseball fans. They too, made their headquarters at the old Arlington and it was there that Bob Ripley, creator of the “Believe It Or Not” cartoon spent a time 6 with the Giants. He sustained a broken arm while working with the Giants and gave up baseball after this, devoting his time to his present work of cartooning. While the major teams were training here, famous sport writers including Sam Crane, Boseman [olger?], Damon Runyan and Grantland Rice accompanied the teams to Marlin.

“Famous politicians, statesmen, governors and others who visited in Marlin stopped at the Arlington. One of them was [?]. Butler who rose from a blacksmith to one of the most famous ward bosses of St. Louis. Among the famous lecturers who stopped at the Arlington were Henry Watterson and Ex-Governor Bob Taylor of Tennessee who were in Marlin as lecturers on a [lyceum?] course.

“Just as the old tavern served its time, so the Old and New Arlington Hotels served theirs. After retirement of Mr. Levy, the hotel changed hands several times and in 1935, it ceased to operate as a hotel and was turned into an apartment house. A number of more modern hotels had been built in the intervening years. In 1937, the property was sold to the Falls Hotel Company at a low price, and a few months later the building was deeded to the Marlin Independent School District, with the understanding that the school would see the

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material salvaged from the huge structures for the purpose of creating an auditorium-gymnasium for the school. The sole consideration was that the school district was to secure a [??] project for wrecking the building and erecting the auditorium-gymnasium and fill the basement of the hotel site and cover the entire site of the building with eighteen inches of soil. This consideration has been carried out and the lot is ready once more for another 7 building.

“Another interesting incident worthy of note is the wrecking of the Falls County Court House, preparatory to building a new \$218,000 County Court House. Of especial interest to me is the removing of the old Falls County clock, which hung in the [cupale?] of the building. It was silenced after fifty-one years of service. It had gone thro' all kinds of weather, but had always tolled the dinner and quitting hour for the employees of the court house and town.

“Neither the heat of summer or the cold of winter was ever able to completely conquer the old time piece and it has been in constant use save for short periods when minor accidents caused it to cease its constant ticking. The big hail of 1913, which shattered 144 windows in the court house, including those about the clock tower, failed to halt its ticks. Thick blankets of snow or heavy coating of ice did not halt its faithful striking of the hour. In times of storm or calm, always the hour would be struck, though sometimes muffled by the blowing of the wind or heightened by the stillness of the night.

“Towereing as it did above the country-side, the clock tower was used as a lookout in times of flood, to observe the progress of the rising water from the near-by Brazos river, and many a warning was given in time to rescue inhabitants of the lowlands by the use of the tower. It is possible to view the whole country on a clear day or night. The lights of [Waco?] 28 miles away, may be clearly seen. Many bird's eye views of Marlin and Reagan, (just 11 miles away) have been viewed from the tower as it has been in other nearby communities. Many an old pioneer 8 can remember in his early days the lookout when the Courthouse was first built, and how it was often used by visitors for a view of the country.

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"The story of the Falls County Courthouses are of equal interest to the people over the whole county. The old time court days are still held, and at this time the whole county is usually represented. You may see the crowd, a typical one, from the [Brazos?] bottom negro tenant to the wealthy Brazos bottom planter who takes this day to come and visit with his friends or to listen to the latest case being tried in the Courthouse.

"I remember the City Hall as being the oldest building in [Marlin?]. It was erected before the Civil War and was occupied in ante-bellum days as a mercantile establishment by Bartlett and Bowles and then by Green and Bartlett. It served as a school building for a time and was finally bought by the city and converted into the City Hall, housing all of the city's officers.

"On a certain occasion during the reconstruction days, its roof supported a citizen's squad of vigilants, armed with long rifles and shotguns with eyes riveted on the courthouse, watching every crook and turn as the white voters marched between lines of bayonets in the hands of "freedmen soldiers" to exercise their right of the polls. The [parapet?] wall of this building afforded a good gun rest for the vigilantes during the watch.

"For four days this scene was repeated, it taking this long for the voters to register, the county only allowing one voting place by the "carpet-bag" government then in power. But as it so happened the negro "freedmen soldiers" managed to help keep the peace and the voting went off 9 with no trouble, altho' it was said that out of a spirit of mischief a reckless white man began shooting on the last day and this caused a hurried departure to the Brazos bottom of the negro voters who had been to register.

"At the southeast corner of the building there was erected in 1872 a great flagpole, 100 feet high, from the top of which suspended an immense flag by the supporters of Horace [Greely?] when one branch of the National Democratic party accepted him, a Liberal Republican, as a compromise candidate for the presidency. The pole stood there for many years after the heat of the campaign had died down and the flag, ripped and torn by

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the wind, was finally lowered. For many years afterward (until it finally succumbed to the elements of nature) the flag pole was known as the "Greely Pole".

"When the city of Marlin bought the building and converted it into a City Hall, it was worked over, inside and out, and a wing was added. Today all the officers of the city are housed there, during the building of the new Courthouse, while the American Legion meets upstairs where the City Library is also housed. The Auxiliary meets downstairs.

"The second floor of this old building was used for many years as law offices by some of the Marlin attorneys. Among them was the firm of Goodrich and Clarkson, attorneys in the famous suit of "Hancock vs Hancock involving the title to a large tract of [Falls?] County land and which went up and down through the courts of Texas for thirty years.

"The engineering workmen of Levi Goodrich, city engineer occupies the same office where his father's law office was during the years he was a 10 practicing attorney in the early days. This building was also used for a high school building following the burning of the high school building in September of 1900, that stood in the lot where the Marlin Compress Company now stands.

"The building of the new Falls County Courthouse is another link of the present with the past, the story of the different Falls County Courthouses in itself is another story." C-12. Tex.